

Cécile B. Evans  
*Studies for a Series of Adaptations of Giselle*  
October – November 2020

Room 1 : opening Saturday, 3 October, 2020  
Exhibition from 7 to 31 October, 2020

Room 2 : online from 9 to 15 October, 2020  
Screening of *A Screen Test of an Adaptation of Giselle*  
Everyday at 8 p.m.

La Salle de bains, 1 rue Louis Vitet, Lyon FR

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Cécile,

I hope you're well. Is it as hot in London as it is here?

So I've been watching recordings of ballet on the Internet for a few days now; I have to say I've even developed a certain addiction. Alone in front of my screen, I find myself moved by Giselle's fate. It's a curious experience of empathy rooted in the effect of repeating the drama and the slight variations of the performances. The thing that is most unexpected is that I'm particularly touched by the most classic versions of the choreography and the staging, like the American Ballet Theatre's 1969 staging and its pastoral set designed for television broadcast. The opera stage is practically the television studio set of a silent sitcom. Speaking of sets, I also loved the one – actually very postmodern! – that is part of Mats Ek's staging from the 1980s. In it Giselle's dancing is awfully erotic! But I agree with you, transposing the forest to a mental hospital is very jarring. For me – maybe influenced by you – I saw the Wilis as a pre-feminist image of empowerment...

Anyway, so I've watched over and over all those Giselles descend into madness and die of unrequited love, all those Albrechts at the hands of the Wilis, condemned to dance until they die, actually, to "dance to death" (which is nonetheless a fine trick for highlighting the endurance of a dancer; I had never seen such series of entrechats!); and that plunges me in a blue mood that's a bit pathetic, accompanied by Adolphe Adam's energetic themes pounding in my head.

These multiple incarnations of the same story make Giselle a heroine whose self is shifting, and I understand better how she is at the center of a scenario in which the fluidity of identities is a political matter in the version, or versions, that you envision. I also understand that the issue at stake in your project is not so much adapting a ballet from the past – a work that would have been forgotten – but focusing on the questions that are raised by the work of adaptation, in terms of medium, narrative, and esthetic.

I find this deconstruction of narrative, representation, and, simultaneously, the production of both (that is, the video in the process of being made) in your work quite interesting. If I understand correctly, what you envision for La Salle de bains would be to

deploy more explicitly and directly those elements that are normally understood in the subtext of your works, and not put them in any fixed form. I guess that it will be closer to the lectures you give, illustrated with images and research gleaned from different domains; it's a way of proposing important hypotheses and connections in something that is already an esthetic experience. That may echo the logic of paranoid thinking, which is after all the final expression that questions "what they are now doing to us." That made me think that the show might suggest something of the airing of an investigation, a multifaceted investigation since a number of things come together in it, the plot of a thriller (your adaptation of *Giselle*), the interconnections between the notions of Capitalism-witches-virus-feminism-Romanticism-existential regimes-gender confusion-community-invisibility-utopia-emotions-revolt (sorry for this evasive list), and finally questions concerning the language of fiction, questions of representation and transmission through the moving image and the actors' performances.

As for the installation of the show, from the first your idea has been to bathe La Salle de bains in green. For me that conjures up both a digital space (but darker) and the forest of the Wilis (am I on the right track?) You say that there will be display cases as well and I'm convinced that we have to make them ourselves, from a do-it-yourself design. But the display cases also remind me of museum-oriented displays. I began by telling myself that this was how historical ballets are understood (in particular avant-garde ballets, *Giselle* being a bit earlier but already pointing forward to the total artwork project), then I switched points of view after that overdose of ballet videos on YouTube and the realization that *Giselle* had never really disappeared from the repertoires. After that, I like the idea of an inversion of the chronology consisting of showing archives of the film shoot before the film, the "making of" prior to the actual motion picture, since there is no issue with spoilers. The joys of reshooting the scene and reenactments lie in watching the developments of a story we already know!

Let's pick up these reflections as soon as we can.

Best regards,

Julie

PS I have to find for you that radio program about a village where the inhabitants were having inexplicable hallucinations, as if under the influence of hard drugs, eventually attributed to a substance produced by rye ergot; that put me in mind afterwards of the super bacteria in your *Giselle's* barley wine!

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archival documents, working documents (script, storyboard), music by Paul Pargas,  
Hinako Omori, Carrie Stacks (vocals) and Maggie Cutter (cello)

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Cécile B. Evans (1983), lives and works in London.

After studying theatre, Cécile B. Evans directed several films and multimedia installations that were widely distributed around the world, including *Sprung a Leak* at the Tate Liverpool (UK) in 2016, *What the Heart Wants* at the Kunsthalle Aarhus (DK) in 2017, *Amos' World, Episode 1* at the mumok, (Vienna, AT) in 2018, and *Amos' World* at the FRAC Lorraine (Metz) in 2019.

Alongside La Salle de bains, Cécile B. Evans is taking part in the MOVE! 2020 festival at the Centre Pompidou (Paris) and will present an installation-performance of which La Salle de bains participates in its production.

Cécile B. Evans is represented by the Emmanuel Layr gallery (Vienna, AT and Rome, IT).

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In partnership with the Cinema Comoedia, Lyon